



**TRAUMATIC INCIDENTS:
MANAGING STUDENT and STAFF WELLBEING
A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAMS
March 2016**

If you require support from one of the Traumatic Incident teams located in each of the 16 Ministry of Education, Special Education (MoE-SE) districts please call your local MoE-SE office or 0800 TI TEAM at any time during or after hours. You can also call your region's Director of Education who will coordinate the response with the TI team.

<http://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/contact-us/district-office-contacts/>

0800 TI TEAM (0800 848 326)

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Introduction

When a traumatic incident impacts on the school community the way it is managed strongly influences people's recovery and can minimise further risk. Most schools have excellent procedures in place for emergency management of incidents such as fires, floods, earthquakes, lockdowns, or when medical attention is required. Schools that have experienced such traumatic incidents and other types of incidents involving accidental or non-accidental student or staff death or severe injury, allegations of abuse against a staff member, major loss of school property etc will understand the impact on the school community and will have learned from this.

It is well recognised that school personnel are in the best position to respond to traumatic incidents in their community. They have the appropriate knowledge, expertise and experience, and most importantly, the depth and range of relationships needed to help children and young people and staff recover from an incident. However, being in a crisis state can affect an individual's ability to manage an incident because during a crisis people may experience:

- A temporary state of distress and disorganisation
- Inability to use their customary methods of problem solving
- General upset or inability to maintain a state of emotional equilibrium
- Difficulty 'directing' emotional reactions
- Feeling lost, disorientated, and powerless

This guide focuses mostly on the recovery of people and what needs to be considered to establish systems and clear procedures to best support children, young people, teachers and other adults in the school community in the aftermath of a traumatic event. The goal is to aid recovery and to reduce the longer term potential for further harm.

Note: A separate document of checklists to help prepare the school environments for natural disasters, lockdown situations and other emergency procedures has been developed with school principals and is available on the Ministry of Education website <http://www.education.govt.nz/school/student-support/emergencies/>

The Ministry would like to acknowledge the school sector representatives on the Ministry's Health and Safety Advisory Group and many other principals across the country who took time to review this guide and provide feedback and suggestions.

Defining a Traumatic Incident

Traumatic incidents are sudden, unpredictable events that come out of the blue. Traumatic incidents in the NZ school context are broadly defined as events that:

- Cause sudden and/or significant disruption to the operation, or effective operation, of a school and their community
- Have the potential to affect a large number of students and staff
- Create significant dangers or risks to the physical and emotional wellbeing of children, young people and people within a community
- Attract media attention or a public profile for the school as a result of these incidents

Examples of traumatic incidents include:

- The sudden accidental or non-accidental death or serious injury of a child, young person, staff member or family/whānau member
- Witnessing serious injury or death of a child, young person, staff member or family/whānau member
- Threats to the safety of students or staff, including the presence of an individual behaving in a threatening manner
- Physical or sexual abuse that impinges on the school
- Serious fraud, theft or vandalism
- A lost or missing child, young person or staff member
- Floods, fires, earthquakes and other community crises or natural disasters

The processes described in this guide will support the recovery of affected people within a school community whatever the incident, even though there will be degrees of response.

Note: It may be that another school in your area is the one experiencing a traumatic incident rather than yours. Offering your help and supporting through small acts of kindness will be very much appreciated.

How the Ministry Traumatic Incident (TI) Team can help

Each Ministry special education district has a TI Coordinator with a small team of trained staff who can support schools after a traumatic incident has occurred. The team can support schools through the establishment of effective systems to help minimise risk to the physical and emotional well-being of students, teachers and parent communities. The teams also offer training in incident management.

When an incident occurs you may just wish to phone the district office to talk with someone from the TI team, to run something by them or have what you have already done affirmed and what you might need to do next discussed. In bigger events you can request that a team (usually two or three people) come to the school to support your school's management team. Your regional Director of Education will always be informed immediately of an incident and if other supports from education teams are required this will be organised. You can also contact the Director in the first instance and they will ensure TI team support is available. The Ministry TI teams do not take over and manage the incident for you; rather they can help your management team to:

- Develop appropriate processes for dealing with an incident to ensure the safety and well-being of your students and staff and to return your school to normal operations as quickly as possible
- Understand the emotional and psychological impacts of a traumatic incident and the effects such impacts can have on how people behave, and advise you on things you can do to support people who have been involved in a traumatic incident
- Communicate about the incident appropriately and safely with your students, staff, parents and the community – including the media
- Link you with other appropriate services where necessary
- Support your evaluation of the school's procedures after an incident

If the Ministry team hears about an incident affecting your school, a team member will call you to offer condolences and support should you want it.

The team does not provide counselling to affected students or teachers but they may be able to help direct you to services that can help individuals if necessary.

This service is available during the week, in the evening, and weekends as it is important that planning the management of an incident happens as soon as possible.

Being Prepared to Respond

Schools are expected to have a policy about all major issues and this includes traumatic incidents. A traumatic incident can be a stressful experience and, as it is usually sudden and unexpected, a planned response can do much to lessen the impact and accelerate recovery.

It is important to have a written traumatic incident policy about how the school will manage the wellbeing of students and staff as well as an overview of things that need to be considered in the aftermath of a traumatic incident. The flow chart on page 7 could be included as the process part of your policy.

The policy will give your school community the overview of traumatic incident management however it is the procedures, and rationale for them, outlined throughout this guide that provide the checklists of things that need to be considered.

A clear set of procedures to follow and knowing the supports available in your community can make things less overwhelming in a time of crisis.

- A carefully formulated policy which takes into account the specific characteristics of your school community will allow you to ensure the safety, and other needs, of all students, staff and the wider school community are met
- Having a process to follow will help to avoid confusion and ensure help is available to the school community as quickly as possible
- Without a process it is more likely that management may 'knee-jerk' into inappropriate action because events can be overwhelming, including not knowing how to respond quickly and effectively to meet the needs of students and colleagues
- An agreed policy and process avoids any after-the-event blame-laying by other staff, parents/caregivers/whānau, other agencies, or media
- Clear procedures provide a safety net for children, school staff and the wider school community
- Individual needs can be met with the least amount of delay and without any unintentional or additional trauma.

The School Crisis Management Team (CMT)

This is the team within the school which can be activated and be functional immediately after notification of a traumatic event. A key to supporting the recovery process is to get things back to predictable, day to day school routines and structures as soon as possible. With this in mind it is important that the membership of the CMT doesn't impact on the ability to get on with things as usual if at all possible. The CMT initially assesses the circumstances of the crisis or traumatic event (eg, what happened, how many will likely be affected and to what degree they will be affected) and then set up:

- Systems that support school continuity and the return to regular routines and structures
- Systems to identify and support children, young people and staff who are vulnerable
- Systems that will provide immediate crisis intervention in the form of Psychological First Aid (see links on page 66) such as having easy access to:
 - Factual, accurate, timely information about the event or incident
 - Opportunities to clarify and understand information about the event
 - Age and culturally appropriate activities to support this understanding
 - Information on psychological needs and mental health issues
 - Information on coping strategies
 - Resources for assistance if needed
 - Connecting with others

The CMT should meet together regularly throughout the day to plan next steps and, as a team, agree on actions as events unfold. Collective decision-making acts as a safe guard as does keeping full records of all decisions made.

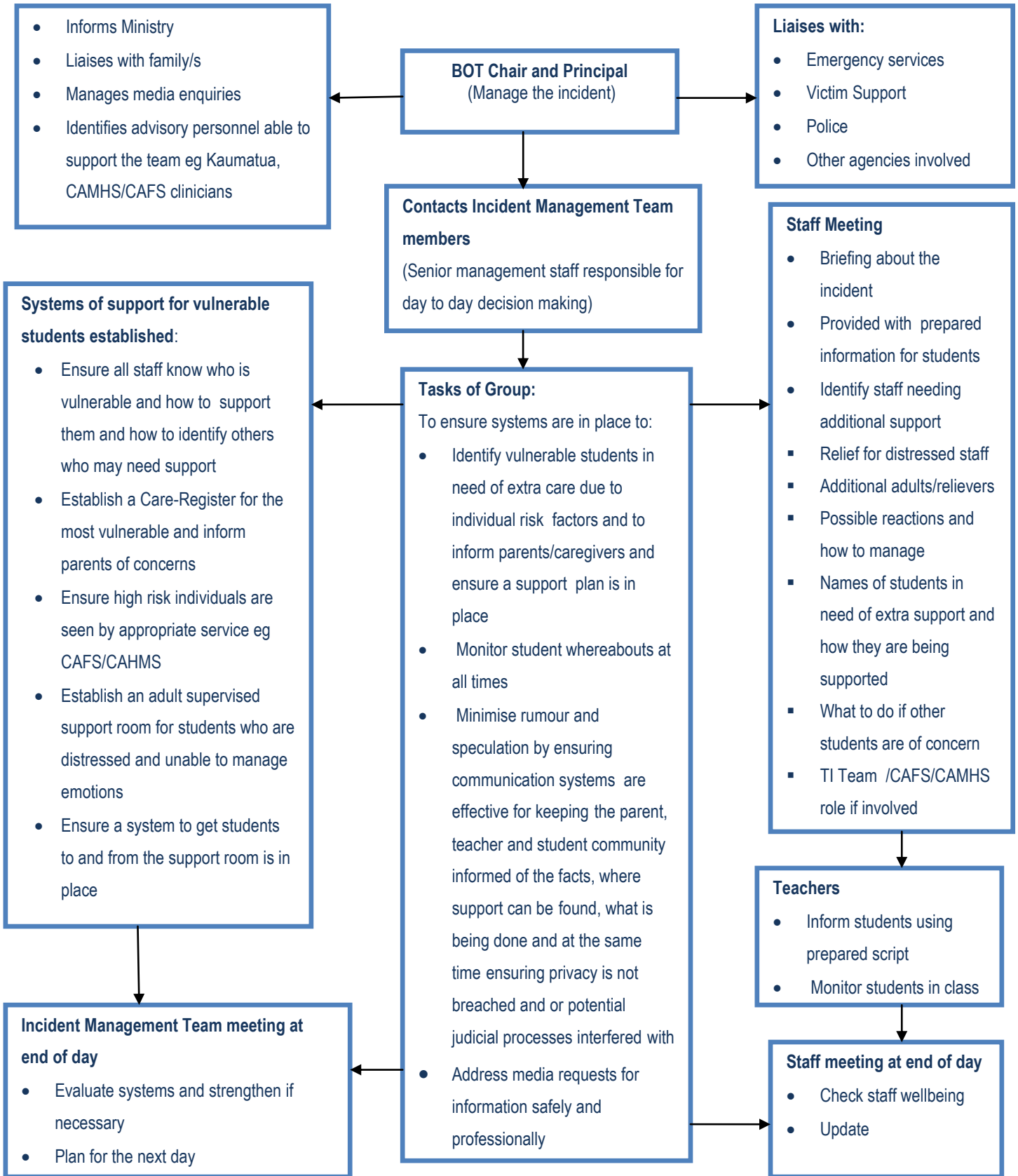
Things to consider when deciding on Crisis Management Team membership

- The team membership should be identified in the policy document and should always include the Principal and the BOT chair and small number of other senior staff
- Ideally members should not only be reliable and level-headed but also equipped with the physical and emotional strength needed to face a traumatic incident
- Traumatic incidents often require teams to be particularly mindful of specific cultural customs, beliefs and rituals; particularly beliefs around death (including suicide) and illness. The makeup of the team may need to change slightly depending on the incident

- In secondary schools (during the incident) the Guidance Counsellor/s role is to support vulnerable students in terms of their emotional well-being. It is strongly recommended that Guidance Counsellors are not a member of the CMT but that communication systems to and from the CMT and the counsellor about vulnerable students are established with the counsellor early and evaluated with the counsellor at the end of each day

BRIEF OVERVIEW FOR INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAMS

FIRST 24 HOURS



Procedures

Note: *The following checklists aim to cover what could be considered but not all will be necessary for all incidents as it depends on the magnitude of the incident, the number affected and the risks involved.*

First steps for the CMT

- Meet as soon as possible after being informed of the incident
- Establish the facts about the incident
- Contact all staff, including teacher aides, caretakers and regular relievers (a telephone tree with one or two people responsible for checking off who has been contacted can be helpful) and inform them of the incident and the time of a staff meeting.
- Contact other schools if other family members attend there
- If appropriate, contact RTLBs and SWIS workers currently working in the school and others who visit the school regularly eg health nurse
- Appoint a media spokesperson
- Identify a family liaison person
- Organise for relief teachers to be on standby or organise relievers for affected teachers
- If the event involved a death on the facility grounds seek advice so an appropriate cultural response can be organised
- Organise for additional adults to supervise during breaks
- In a major event a dedicated phone line may need to be established
- Contact the Ministry of Education TI team if necessary

Immediate tasks for CMT (these need to be ready for the first staff meeting)

- Identify teachers and other staff who are likely to be most affected and consider potential supports they may need
- Identify and list vulnerable children and young people you believe will need additional care and develop a plan to monitor their well-being (this list can be added to or names removed as appropriate)
- Establish a system for staff to communicate concerns they have about individual students
- Establish a system that enables students' whereabouts to be tracked at all times and any unexplained absences followed up quickly
- Develop scripts for teachers to inform their students in class

- Identify a place away from regular class for students who remain distressed when most others have calmed and identify two familiar adults who will supervise this space
- Identify one or two (or more depending on the size of the school and the magnitude of the incident) staff members or regular visitors to the school as the people who will be called to come and take distressed students from class to the support room and back to their class
- In secondary schools develop a prioritised, appointment-based system of getting students in need of Guidance Counsellor support to the counsellor's room that avoids students having to wait in the vicinity
- Establish a system to ensure vulnerable students can access appropriate support quickly. Guidance Counsellors based in secondary schools may be available to come to support vulnerable students in primary or intermediate schools
- Identify a 'front desk' person (may need more in a big event) who will respond to enquiries from parents, students and media.
- Develop scripts for the front desk person to respond to enquiries from parents and media
- Ensure "Visitor" badges are available and all visitors are asked to sign in (and out) and badges returned when leaving schools grounds

The CMT will need to decide the timing of information being given and sometimes what information can be given and what has to be put on hold.

Full staff meeting

After an incident people respond best when they feel included and have a part to play.

Ensuring staff are fully informed of the facts and kept up to date about the incident, what is being done and what they can do to help is critical to the recovery process.

- Update staff about the incident as far as you know
- Explain the possible reactions they may experience or already be experiencing with an emphasis on these being normal reactions to abnormal circumstances, what coping strategies may help, and ways staff will be supported, a place to go if overwhelmed, availability of relief teachers etc
- Outline the system to access support for themselves, individual teachers may need support to deal with empty desk/ possessions, or to tell their class what has happened, or are just plain overwhelmed or affected due their own life experiences or closeness to the incident
- Explain when, where and how students are to be informed

- Provide age-appropriate scripts for teachers to refer to when informing students of an incident - this will help teachers manage their own emotions as well as ensuring that all students get exactly the same information at the same time at the right level for the developmental age and stage of children
- Provide information on possible student reactions and how to manage them (again the emphasis is that these are normal reactions to abnormal circumstances)
- Discuss the list of students you believe may need more care or need to be supervised more closely and explain the system for staff to communicate concerns they have about individual students not on the list or who are identified at a later stage
- Explain why it is important to try and maintain the usual daily structures and normal routines
 - While the incident has thrown things out of kilter, most things remain the same - there is safety in predictability
 - Trauma reactions are normal reactions and best helped in a normal environment
 - There is reassurance in the predictability of normal routines
 - The school is the normal place for children to be and can offer security in a time of insecurity
 - Resuming normal structures does not mean pretending the traumatic incident did not happen or minimising the effect it has had
 - Returning to the normal structures of the school day with familiar routines and activities will accelerate the recovery process of children and staff
- Explain the supports available for students and the system to get them to and from these supports safely
- Provide information on how to respond to tricky questions by students (generally this would mean being prepared to tell the facts as you know them; be honest; answer questions without reiterating awfulness and without dwelling on distressing detail; if you don't know say so; accept what is said but discount rumour and speculation)
- Name the media spokesperson and how staff should respond if approached by media
- Name the family liaison person and their role
- Explain how the CMT will communicate important updates, who will be responsible for this and how staff can communicate to the CMT if the systems established are not effective

- Suggestions for special activities within normal class routines, making cards, drawings, letters or poems for the grieving family or injured student
- Explain the plan for getting additional or relief staff if required
- Explain the plan for additional interval/lunchtime duty staff and what duty teachers should be alert to in student behaviour
- Explain how to approach unfamiliar visitors seen on the school grounds, identifying them (if possible) and accompanying them to reception to sign in and get a “Visitors” badge if it is appropriate for them to be there. Also explain what to do if the person does not comply
- Give the time of the next staff meeting (typically the CMT should plan for a full staff meeting each morning and after the school day so the most up-to-date information can be shared as events unfold and so teachers can contribute to the evaluation of the systems that have been established)

Note: *There can be times when not all information can be shared with staff (eg where there have been allegations of abuse or a criminal investigation is occurring). It is important to let staff know that there is information that at this stage you are not permitted to share (give the reason) but as soon as it is allowed to be made public they will be the first to be told.*

Note: *Consider contacting the parents of children who are due to start at your school and suggest this be deferred for a couple of days until normal routines are up and running to ensure a positive start for their child.*

Additional support for reception/administration staff

Front desk staff can be particularly vulnerable eg dealing with anxious or angry parents, students, media enquiries, managing phone calls, parents congregating, dealing with questions etc. These staff will be as affected as teachers and will potentially have to manage a wide range of things. In a big event it may mean that extra people are called on to support

- Develop a script of what to say and do when media calls are received or a media person arrives at the school
- Develop a script for dealing with parents or children’s questions (this helps front desk staff to remain factual and calm and minimises the opportunity for speculation)
- Explain exactly what to do and say if angry or upset parents confront them

- Establish what they need to do should a person they do not recognise comes to reception and either refuses to give their name or purpose for being there or whose behaviour is of concern

Tasks immediately after the staff meeting

- Ensure the adults who will be responsible for supporting students in a setting away from classrooms understand the purpose of the room, the systems to get student back to class, and what to do if they have concerns about an individual using the support room
- Develop a media plan (see pages 15 and 16)
- Prepare letters for distribution to the parent community and decide on timing of distribution decided (in events that have involved an alleged offence the content and timing of distribution needs to be in accordance with the judicial process)

Ensure the CMT members have supports

- Recognize the impact on yourself and your family
- Identify personal support structures

Communication about the event

Communication with students

It is acknowledged that access to social media means many, particularly older students, will have already heard and be reacting to the news. Given the speed of information via social media, often carrying incorrect information, informing students at school is an opportunity to give the facts as known, dispel rumour and speculation and to support them to use social media responsibly and positively. Avoid telling students in an assembly as there is no way of knowing how the news will impact on individuals and reactions cannot be predicted. The potential emotional ripple effect of hearing distressing news en masse may make it difficult to contain students.

- Tell close friends of the victim in private allowing them time to be together to support each other away from the public eye
- Have familiar teachers/deans inform students in their class or home room rather than all together at an assembly. An exception to this might be a rural school with a small roll and only one or two teachers, or a Māori immersion school where all are considered whānau
- The script provided to teachers should include the facts about what has happened, what the school is doing to support the family, what students can do to support each other and that if they have questions or are concerned about anyone they need to talk to their teacher
- Information given to students should normalise responses to trauma and offer techniques for basic coping and stress management
- For younger children the concept and understanding of death may not be fully developed – be prepared for tricky questions that will need to be answered truthfully
- Explain to students that (in high-interest events) they may be asked to talk to TV or newspaper reporters and ask them to not do this but refer them to the school's media spokesperson

Statements to students

- Contain accurate information
- Provide consistency of information
- Avoid distressing detail
- Are age appropriate

Communication with the parent community

Any communication to the parent community should be checked by the CMT to ensure they contain factual information and, as far as possible, avoid distressing details that have the potential to increase parental concern or heighten emotions at an already emotional time. The affected family's wishes for confidentiality should be kept in mind and, before any detail about the injured or deceased or what happened is released to other parents, permission needs to be given. There are also legal obligations regarding what can be communicated and when, for example in the case of name suppression orders, or when the cause of death has not been confirmed by the coroner.

- Some incidents may just require a newsletter explaining what has happened and acknowledging the family that has been affected
- Communication about events that have had a wider impact needs to include how parents can support their child, what the school is doing to support students, other support networks available and who to speak to at the school if they have concerns
- For bigger events where many have been affected, information for parents should include the facts, possible reactions and behaviours they may see in their child and any risks associated with the incident. If a student is considered at high risk, visiting the parent rather than sending a communication home with the student is safer
- Where there are potential risks to young people communications need to be written in way that is honest, provides coping strategies and reassures parents ie doesn't increase concerns in an already emotional and frightening time
- It can be helpful to provide a handout on age-appropriate reactions that children may experience after a traumatic incident and ways parents can support them
- In high interest incidents the media may take opportunities to interview parents. While responding or not will be a parental choice, parents can be guided to refer media to the school's media spokesperson
- Check cultural appropriateness of panui content with Kaumatua or other cultural advisor

Statements to parents

- State the facts
- Describe what the school is doing
- What is planned
- How their children might react
- How to support their child
- An invitation to share concerns about their own child if worried or unsure

Note: *In situations where there is, or potentially could be, a criminal investigation the school should consult with police and the facility's lawyer before releasing any information. NZSTA can also support.*

Communication with the media

The media is increasingly interested in traumatic incidents, particularly those involving violence, allegations of abuse or suspected suicide. In many cases, media will be at an incident that involves students before school staff knows there has been one. The media will take every opportunity to fulfil their legitimate role in providing public information and reporters can be expected to use any means at their disposal to obtain a story including being extremely persistent /ruthless if school personnel refuse to talk to them. It is much better to be prepared to actively control the media and ensure the school has control of when, where and how communication with media will occur. Schools can often use the media productively to assist recovery efforts.

Planning for media interest

- Appoint a media spokesperson (usually the BOT chairperson or Principal) to take responsibility for all communication with the media
- Recognise the right of the media to ask questions and that they will be trying to find a story
- Keep a log of journalists' names, contact numbers and their organisations and keep a record of all media statements made by the school and news clippings
- Written media statements should be developed by CMT and checked for sensitivity and accuracy. They may not be needed but best to be prepared
- Be prepared for TV media interest in a high impact event. Camera crew and reporters can be asked to leave school property but they may remain outside the gates and may ask parents or students questions. Students in particular can be vulnerable to this so giving them information on how to behave if confronted by media can be helpful
- Be prepared for media interviews after major events and designate a place that could serve as a media interview site, ensuring it is away from children, young people and teachers (off-site is preferable)
- If police are involved they may put out statements rather than the school – if this is the case let the media know and that the school won't be issuing statements at this time

- When an interview is agreed to it is recommended that the questions that will be asked are sent prior to the interview so responses can be prepared and only those questions responded to
- Use the interview or media statement to:
 - Discuss positive steps taken to address the incident and try to get the media to support the response by reporting where concerned people can go for further support
 - Emphasise the primary goal of the school is to help children, young people, teachers and families/whānau to get through the situation and get back to normal as quickly as possible
 - Do not give assurances that may later prove to be unwarranted such as 'Everything is under control'.
- It is important that the media spokesperson takes control of the situation by responding when he or she is prepared rather than being caught off guard
 - Say only those things you are confident of saying and are factual - avoid getting into discussion or speculation
 - Take your time and if you don't know, say so
 - When interviews are over the spokesperson should avoid entering into general discussion or give 'off the record' statements – there is no such thing
- Inform bereaved family and whānau of any statements prior to releasing to media and inform them if the school's spokesperson will be interviewed, by whom and when
- Ensure all staff are briefed on all aspects of media involvement
- The system for the front desk person to respond to phone calls / visits from media should ensure that rather than the call being put through to the spokesperson immediately, or seeing if he/she is available to meet the spokesperson, the caller is informed that the spokesperson will contact them asap.
- It can be helpful to prepare a script for the front desk person to adhere to as well as one for the spokesperson because some questions from media personnel can catch people off guard and 'trick' them into giving information they shouldn't

Social media

After a traumatic incident a great deal of speculation by students may be played out via social media. It can be helpful to remind students of their responsibility to be good digital citizens and encourage them to post positive messages. Ask students to use social media responsibly and take into account the feelings of family and friends who may see what has been posted. The Online Safety Advisory Group has produced *Digital Technology: Safe and responsible use in schools* to support schools in the management of safe and responsible use of digital technology in schools. The guide is available at www.netsafe.org.nz/managing-digital-technology

Cyber bullying

The Harmful Digital Communications Act (2015) introduced a range of measures, including setting up an agency to investigate and address damaging electronic communications spread through emails, texts and social media posts. At the heart of the Act are two main features:

1. New measures to help victims, and to simplify the process for getting harmful communications off the internet quickly and effectively (for example, establishing the approved agency and court-ordered takedown notices, and outlining a complaints handling process that online content hosts must use if they want the protection of the “safe harbour” provision)
2. New criminal offences to penalise the most serious perpetrators (for example, the new criminal offences of causing harm by posting harmful digital communications).

The Act defines harm as “serious emotional distress.” It also sets out 10 communications principles that play a role in the processes for resolving complaints. The 10 principles provide guidance for how people should communicate online. They include that a digital communication should not be threatening, intimidating or menacing; grossly offensive; indecent or obscene; or denigrating of a person’s race, gender, sexual orientation or disability. Other principles include that digital communications should not disclose sensitive personal about someone; be used to harass a person; and should not incite or encourage others to send harmful messages. The full list of principles is in section 6 of the Act.

Please contact the police or NetSafe <http://www.netsafe.org.nz/> for advice if you are informed of or see inappropriate messaging.

Wellbeing of Individuals

Normal reactions

After a traumatic incident some children, young people and adults are at greater risk of not coping because of their previous experiences such as:

- Multiple exposure to traumatic events
- Witnessing the event
- Recent death of a loved one; especially a non-accidental death such as suicide or homicide when stress can be worsened or complicated by feelings of grief, guilt and the cultural norms surrounding the incident
- Loss of possessions and disruption to routines
- The relationships they had with injured or deceased (negative as well as positive)
- Surviving an incident eg child being abducted or a hostage situation

While some people may need extra support and may benefit from seeing a mental health professional or a counsellor this generally would not be the first response required.

- Most people, even those with the above risk factors, recover without any need for additional intervention
- Friends, family, colleagues, the class teacher or dean are often the best 'counsellors' – someone familiar to talk with, express feelings with, to try and make sense of the event with
- Providing additional support, outside of what the school is already providing, to individuals and groups who are capable of adaptively coping has been found to build resentment
- It can also result in groups and individuals believing that they will need support to cope with other situations of adversity because they have lost confidence and belief that they can cope on their own

It is important to understand reactions to trauma that are normal. People have reported:

- Feeling 'switched on' and in a state of readiness to react to a potential threat at all times
- Over reacting to minor issues
- Disorganised thought processes
- Sleep disturbance
- General feeling of anxiety
- Impaired memory storage

- Difficulty in concentrating and in managing the day-to-day tasks
- Loss of confidence or self-esteem
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Intrusive nightmares and thoughts about the event, flashbacks
- Reassessment of the meaning of life goals and values
- Using coping mechanisms such as social withdrawal, alcohol, drugs, or making major life changes. These may, in fact, worsen the situation and impede recovery.

Normal structures and routines

Schools are encouraged to maintain or return to regular school routines and activities as soon as possible. The impact of a traumatic incident, for both students and teachers, can be lessened by maintenance of, or a return to, normal structures. Teachers can be supported to understand trauma reactions and why typical routines and structures can support recovery.

- People often behave unexpectedly after a traumatic event - there are no typical reactions and no one can predict how they will react
- A range of reactions is normal
 - Some people may be more frightened
 - Some may have lost more
 - The type of incident may bring back unpleasant memories
 - Some may believe it was their fault or that they could have prevented it
 - Some may have experienced other trauma
- Trauma and grief reactions are normal reactions and best helped in a familiar environment with familiar people
- There is reassurance and safety in the predictability of typical routines
- The school is the normal place for children and young people and their teachers to be and can offer security in a time of insecurity and uncertainty
- Resuming normal structures and routines does not mean pretending the traumatic incident did not happen or minimising the effect it has had
- Familiar routines and activities will accelerate the recovery process of children and staff
- Children and young people are more likely to need the adults in their lives to help them feel a sense of comfort and safety following an incident
- They are also more likely to need the adults they know and trust to take the lead immediately after an incident and to help them make sense of what has happened

- It is important that adults support children and young people to make sense of an incident by drawing on the existing cultural practices and resources available within their community
- Children and young people will feel a sense of confidence and self-belief when the adults in their lives are able to manage and respond to their needs and provide meaning to a traumatic incident
- Children and young people depend on the support they get from the adults in their lives to cope over the long term

Individual wellbeing (younger children)

Children will be affected by the events whether or not they are at the age where they fully understand loss and grief and they will model their responses on the adults who care for them. They will respond in kind to adults who model healthy emotional behaviour for them. Individual children will react differently to the same situation. These differences are determined by a variety of factors including the cognitive and emotional development of the child. However, there are responses that tend to be typical of various age groups.

Teachers and parents can be advised to:

- Give frequent attention through the provision of verbal reassurances and physical comforting which will help to re-establish a sense of security for children
- Let children talk about the incident (they may ask the same questions over and over)
- Talk with children about what won't change in their life and help them to use feelings in safe ways
- Answer questions honestly and simply at a level appropriate to the age and stage of development of the child
- Encourage children to talk about how they are feeling and accept what they say – let them know how you are feeling too and tell them what you are going to try to do to start feeling better
- Expect some behavioural changes for a while, previously independent children may become clingy and anxious about being left, some children may regress to younger behaviours such as thumb-sucking or bed-wetting
- Support children to think of ways they would like to help
- Involve them in tasks that use their energies and abilities in meaningful ways.
- Once children have had time to absorb the news, the teacher is in the best position to know when to get back to the regular classroom activities (sooner rather than
- Discuss what can be done now to help people

- Make cards /draw pictures
 - For the family of those who have died
 - For the child who has died
 - For the friends of the child who has died
 - For helpers eg fire-fighters, police, paramedics
- Make up a song or poem about the person who has died. Put it to music.
- Get together a book about the student who has died to give to the family
 - Pictures
 - Poems
 - Stories
 - Photos
- Write a play about the fun times the child/children had together
- Don't forget to have a little more than usual physical activity.
- Organised team games can be a temporary distraction for grieving children.
- Let them talk about the incident
- Discuss what actually happened giving facts and sorting out rumours from facts

Individual student wellbeing (older students)

Students will react to events that impact on a school in different ways. Adolescence can be a time of emotional ups and downs and there is a higher risk of 'contagious' behaviour. Some may have had similar experiences before and the incident may bring back unpleasant memories. Some will have been closer than others to a person who is a victim. Some may have recently been negative to a deceased person or about them on social media and consequently experience complex emotions. In the case of suspected suicide close friends may experience guilt and remorse at being unable to support their friend. Identifying, supporting and monitoring the well-being and whereabouts of affected students are critical to minimise further risk.

Teachers can be advised to:

- Allow for emotional reactions after students have been informed with the aim of students settling after the initial shock and normal activities beginning
- Allow students to express thoughts and feelings regarding an incident and help normalise reactions

- Avoid getting into speculation and shut down rumour, “That may be so but we don’t know for sure yet what happened. You’ll be informed as soon as we know anything more”.
- Clarify any misinformation and provide factual answers – if you don’t know, say so
- Encourage helping relationships characterised by empathy, warmth and genuineness
- Be aware of cultural differences that exist in expressions of grief (seek advice if unsure)
- Be aware of the ages of the students when answering questions or giving information
- Encourage students to be together and look after each other and to let a teacher know if they have concerns about a another student

Monitoring student whereabouts

- Parents/caregivers of students who do not arrive at school and no reason has been provided should be contacted as soon as possible after the school day starts
- Attendance checks/absences at the beginning of the day, after subject changes and breaks, should be conducted with a system to follow up on unexplained absences immediately (who will follow up and what do they do)
- In large schools it might pay to bring in part time admin staff to assist with checking the roll between each subject period so that unexplained absences can be investigated quickly
- Establish a method for recording the name of any student who is taken from school, who took them and at what time, and the reason for taking the student out of school
- Additional staff during break times could be organised to minimise rumour and speculation, answer questions honestly, be aware of vulnerable students congregating and encouraging students to engage in typical break time activities
- Establish extra supervision of the exit points on the campus throughout the day when the incident is a high risk situation and have a plan for when students ignore the adult monitoring the exit
- Establish a system where no student leaves the premises without parent or caregiver permission – in the case of an at-risk student, a parent or agreed ‘other’ must collect the student
- A system of when a student has been given permission to leave the school grounds needs to include a ‘pass’ system to be shown at the exit
- Students who catch buses to and from school should be monitored to ensure they get on the bus and a system to make sure they arrive at home within their usual timeframe

- Designate 'trackers' to find students who are absent without permission both on and off-site – Police Youth Aide may help with finding students who have left the school grounds

When students need additional support

- Students experiencing distress are best supported by familiar adults
- Some students may need the support of adults away from the class environment. Rather than announcing to all students where this place is and how to access it, which is likely to result in a large number of students leaving class (especially older students), the CMT should establish clear systems to access support that all teachers have had explained and are expected to adhere to
- Teachers know their students' personalities and characteristics well so are in the best position to know when a student, after allowing for the initial shock to subside and time to absorb what has happened, is genuinely unable to manage their emotional response and need some time out to recover
- Being in the support room is only an interim measure to support a student to manage their emotions more privately than can be done in front of peers, with the aim to return to class as soon as possible
- If the student is finding it too overwhelming/distressing and seems unable to cope, their parents need to be informed and asked to come and take them home
- In secondary schools, Guidance Counsellors will know which of their current clients are vulnerable and a systematic way of seeing them (and other students who want to talk to the counsellor) to ascertain their well-being or potential risk needs to be established (appointment based rather than having students waiting about)
- Freeing up staff or asking for RTLB support for certain times of the day on a roster basis can be helpful, to be available in the support room, to be an extra presence during breaks, to be shadow teachers in affected teachers' classes, to take students to and from support rooms, to be with at-risk students who need someone with them at all times, to take over from a teacher should they become overwhelmed and need a break
- Potentially, primary and intermediate schools might see if Guidance Counsellors from secondary schools would be able to be released to support vulnerable students

Note: If the CMT is considering using senior students in a support role this needs to be approached cautiously. The emotional state of these senior students and their own history/experience needs to be carefully considered before implementing any peer support system and a way of regularly checking their wellbeing should be established.

A possible support room system

- The class/form teacher know their students best and is the one who identifies when a student may need to take some time out, gives permission for the student to leave class, and keeps a record of who they are, the time they went to the support room, and the time they returned to class
- Adults in the support room need to understand what their role is and how to respond to student's questions and emotions
- Establish an 'escort' system where adults collect and return students to and from the support room
- The system to get students to and from their classroom to the support room should include a way for the teacher to alert an adult to collect a student and a way for the support rooms' supervising adults to alert when it is time for the student to return class
- Schools may already have established communication systems to relay information to and from teachers to senior management but, if not, one simple way to let someone know that a student needs support outside of the classroom is to text an adult identified as 'escort' so they know to come to (unobtrusively) collect a student
- If the timing of returning to class means to a different subject teacher, the system needs to take this into account so both teachers are informed
- The support room should have a minimum of two familiar adults in attendance to ensure that if one needs to communicate with the CMT there will always be at least one adult present with students
- There needs to be a clear communication system between the adults in the support room and the CMT. This system should communicate when a student needs to be with their parents and a way to let their teacher/s know they have gone home

Supporting the most vulnerable students

When a traumatic incident occurs, the coping techniques of children and young people are less developed than adults'. Adolescents tend to turn to their peer group for support while younger students may have a high dependency on their teachers and family. Close friends, siblings, the extended family of victims, those who have experienced recent trauma or loss should be identified and monitored as they are the most vulnerable and most likely to need additional care and support. Any individual whose reaction is disproportionate to the degree of exposure should be evaluated for other risk factors and any concerns passed on to parents/care givers. This communication should be recorded by the school.

Note: A very clear system needs to be established to ensure students at high risk (especially after a suspected suicide) are not left alone and their parents are contacted

Keeping track

- Child, Adolescent Mental Health Service or Child, Adolescent and Family Services (CAMHS/CAFS) practitioners are usually able to support schools after a suspected suicide and other major traumatic events
- A Care-Register (or At-Risk Register) should be established for those students considered most vulnerable and therefore needing to be seen by CAFS/CAMHS or those needing to speak with a Guidance Counsellor
- An 'appointment' system to get students to and from the Guidance Counsellor or CAFS/CAMHS practitioners needs to be established to avoid vulnerable groups of students standing around waiting to be seen (which can increase risk) and to avoid the practitioners from being overwhelmed
- The Care-Register should show the date and time the student's name is entered, the perceived risks, when and what was done about the risks, what the outcome was, and when and why the student's name was removed from the register
- Parents should be informed if their child is on a Care-Register, how the school is supporting them and how they can support their child at home
- In secondary schools there is usually a Guidance Counsellor and in a big event, especially when a student has allegedly taken their life, there will be a number of very vulnerable students needing support. It's recommended that the CMT, including CMTs of primary and intermediate schools, contact other schools and request support from their Guidance Counsellors.
- Pastoral care systems in primary and intermediate schools may need an increase of personnel to manage the well-being of students considered at risk

Tiered support system

While all students should be monitored for any significant, persistent changes in behaviour, organising a system where students known to be vulnerable are identified into high, medium and low level risk can be helpful to get a grasp on how to identify and decide on what supports may be needed for individual students.

There are known risk factors that traumatic events can trigger and while not all students with one or even all the factors are necessarily at risk, and indeed may have much more prevalent protective factors that promote resiliency and outweigh the risk, erring on the side of caution is sensible. Listing vulnerable students under risk-level format onto a Care-Register can be efficient. The Care-Register should be regularly updated, for example, at each break and published for all staff so they are aware of which students need extra attention and which no longer need close monitoring.

Note: Students may move between the 3 levels, be removed from the list, and other students can be added as required.

Level 1 (high risk) – Based on the individual's:

- Degree of exposure to the crisis event ie witnessing or close proximity to the event
- Close relationship with victims (positive or negative)
- Recent loss or previous trauma
- Pre-existing mental health problems
- Drug and or alcohol abuse
- Previous suicide attempt or self-harm
- Vulnerability to the affects of a crisis due to other risk factors such as disruptive family life with little supervision or support, major social problems, bullying, known to engage in risky behaviours

These students need to be on the Care-Register, assessed, a plan of support developed and behaviour monitored closely at school and at home at all times. In cases of suspected student suicide or other major trauma some of these students may possibly need to have a suicide risk-assessment conducted by a CAHMS/CAFS practitioner. Parent permission and presence is required for this to occur. The only time a mental health practitioner will conduct a risk assessment without parent or guardian permission is if the young person is threatening imminent suicide/homicide and their parents can't be contacted

Secondary school students already known to the Guidance Counsellor, and others wanting to talk with them, should be assessed by the counsellor to identify if the young person needs to go home to parents, parents contacted for consent to be assessed by a CAFS/CAMHS clinician, or returned to class.

Level 2 (moderate risk) – Based on the individual's:

- Extreme emotional response and inability to self-calm easily
- Being known to lack problem-solving or coping strategies when stressed or distressed
- Closeness to the deceased or badly injured

These students should be identified and a decision made regarding them needing to be on a Care-Register or just ensure that all staff are made aware of the potential for them to need additional support, what to look out for, and how to let CMT know when they have concerns. If it is known that a student is receiving a mental health service, the CMT is encouraged to contact the service and let them know of the incident so they can check on their client's well-being and possibly advise CMT what the student may need to support them.

Level 3 (low risk) – Based on an individual's:

- Vulnerability due to their particular family or personal attributes and circumstances which may make it more difficult for them to understand the event or to cope

Teachers need to be aware that these students are a little more vulnerable than some and be encouraged to keep an eye on them.

Other considerations specific to secondary schools

- If the traumatic incident involves a suspected suicide of a student who a Guidance Counsellor has been working with the emotional impact on the counsellor could be immense. A decision needs to be made about whether or not to remove the counsellor from their role temporarily and allocate them different tasks so they are included in the recovery process but not directly involved with assessing student wellbeing
- If the Guidance Counsellor is removed from duties contacting other schools in the area requesting the support of their Guidance Counsellors is an option and is generally agreed to unless their school is affected by the incident as well

- Guidance Counsellors from other schools should be well briefed on the systems the CMT has in place before they start seeing students
- Set up an appointment-based process for students to be seen by Guidance Counsellors and or CAMHS/CAFs personnel, so it is manageable ie students and parents not kept waiting and the appointment is appropriately timed so CAMHS/CAFs or Guidance Counsellors are not overloaded
- Agreement about which students need to be seen by CAMHS/CAFs clinicians needs to be established with them prior to any appointments being made (the risk level system as above support this decision making)

Responding to suspected suicide or suicide attempts

All schools should have a copy of *Preventing and Responding to Suicide – A Resource Kit for Schools* <http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/School/Traumatic-incidents-and-emergencies/SuicidePreventionOCT2013.pdf> which should be referred to if the traumatic incident is as a result of a suspected suicide. Ministry TI teams offer training around this (contact your District Special Education office and ask for the Traumatic Incident (TI) Coordinator)

Pages 10 and 11 have a very helpful checklist for emergency situations

- 1) In the event of a suicide or serious attempt
- 2) If there is a threat of imminent suicide

Pages 12 to 16 can support the CMT to triage students and to determine what actions are needed to manage young people at the risk of suicide.

Pages 28 and 29 have information on recognising suicidal behaviour.

Where to get copies

<http://www.thechair.co.nz/>

Suicide Prevention for Schools Code: 98138

Staff wellbeing

A great deal of responsibility to keep normal structures ticking over rests with the teachers. They will be affected by the incident to various degrees, as will ancillary staff such as teacher aides. Teachers and, particularly, principals are often reluctant to say when they are overwhelmed or not coping, feeling that they must 'put on a brave face' for their staff and students. It is critical to ensure staff well-being is monitored along with that of students.

- Help teachers to understand that their reactions are part of a normal response to a traumatic event and give some ideas to cope with these
- Let them know that showing emotion in front of students is OK – a teacher modelling strategies to cope with their emotional response so regular activities can resume can be very powerful
- Buddy staff / shadow teachers may be helpful for teachers struggling with an emotional response so time out to gather their thoughts can be managed with little disruption to lessons
- Have relievers ready to step in if necessary for those teachers who are most affected
- Ensure staff have opportunities to meet regularly during the first few days following the traumatic incident to try to make sense of what has happened
- Identify and provide support to teachers or other staff, including RTLB and SWIS who:
 - Were close to the student or teacher or family member who is missing or has been injured or is deceased
 - Have experienced a similar incident in the past
 - Have recently lost a family member or close friend
 - Is known to have had negative interactions with or opinion of the student or staff member involved
- Monitor staff for signs of undue stress, including CMT members
- Continue to monitor staff well-being over time – sometimes reactions can be delayed
- Encourage staff to seek support and consultation routinely in order to prevent “compassion fatigue,” also referred to as “secondary traumatic stress.” Be aware that you can develop compassion fatigue from exposure to trauma through the students with whom you work

Support for the affected family

CMT should identify one or two people to be the liaison between the school and the family to:

- Visit parents, offer condolences and discuss the support available from the school
- They can be advised that when visiting family to:
 - Let their genuine concern and caring show
 - Allow family members to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share
 - Ask if an injured child can be visited
 - Offer ongoing support if this is possible and appropriate
 - Ask families how they want information to be shared with the school community
 - Inform families of what is being done to support other children and young people and staff (tailor the level of detail to their emotional state)
 - In the event of a student death ask what they would like to happen to their child's possessions, art work etc that are still at the school (careful timing of this is important)
- Consult with the family before any written communication is distributed to the wider parent community or to media
- Later, explain the support for any siblings returning to school

Note: In some cases the family may not wish to see anyone from the school, where they perceive the school to be culpable, when an allegation of sexual or physical abuse has been made by a child against an adult in the school or an outdoor education accident has occurred.

Funeral attendance /school closure

Often schools ask if they can close their school for a day to allow staff to attend the funeral. Legally, school Boards must ensure that schools are open for instruction for the prescribed number of half-days each year and closing a school for reasons other than natural disasters or emergency situations is not permitted (unless the days are made up later in the year).

In the interests of maintaining typical routines and given that not all students will be attending the funeral service and that many parents work, the facility should remain open on the day of the funeral. Additional help may be required to ensure adequate supervision of those not attending the funeral.

- Consult in culturally appropriate ways with the bereaved whānau/family and be guided by them re what information, if any, about the funeral should go out to the parent community
- Consider the wishes of the whānau/family in all communications from the school, including media statements
- Discuss funeral arrangements with the family and ask what, if anything, they would like the school to do or help with
- Ask other parents to let the school know (as they would with any other absence) if their child will be attending the funeral
- It is recommended that parents always accompany their child to the service even in the case of older students. The emotional fall-out after a student death can be very intense
- If this isn't possible it is recommended the parent asks an adult they know well to take responsibility for them, and ensure they have arranged for their child to be dropped off and picked up after the service and know where they will be afterwards. This is important to minimise risk
- In some cases a school may be asked to hold the funeral at their facility. This issue would need to be managed sensitively however it is not the role of the school. While the request should be respected, the different cultures, faiths, philosophical outlooks, traditions and customs of other students and their families who are part of the school community should be respected also

Managing incidents that occur in boarding schools

The special characteristics of boarding schools, including mainstream or prep schools with a boarding facility, can make management of traumatic incidents, particularly those involving death or allegations of sexual abuse, more difficult because:

- Boarding school students live, work and play together and form extremely close bonds much as a family does
- When a traumatic incident occurs, the impact on young people can be intense and students living away from home do not have immediate access to the family support systems that children and young people typically turn to for support in times of crisis
- Boarders often have siblings, boy/girlfriends, or close friends attending other boarding schools and all will be affected in one way or another, and to differing degrees; the ripple effect of a major incident can be far-reaching and the risks more difficult to manage
- Rumour and speculation can be far reaching due to these wide-ranging networks making it more difficult to ensure only factual information is shared
- Adolescence can be a time of emotional ups and downs and being in such close proximity creates a potentially higher risk of 'contagious' behaviour
- Students from different schools often get together in holiday periods making it more difficult to manage if the incident occurs close to the end of term or when students are home on exam leave
- Being away from their child when an incident occurs, may make parents feel more vulnerable and frightened for the safety of their child, feel guilt at having their child in a boarding situation, or be angry with the school. The risk of blame, and or the school or individuals within the school becoming a scapegoat, may be higher.
- Some schools have boarders whose parents live overseas. Reaching families can prove difficult and where there is a death police usually require name suppression until the family has been informed. Confidentiality when informing the student and parent community can be difficult to manage
- Schools often have two governance Boards; one for the school and one for the boarding side. Generally the two Boards are made up of people who live at a distance making contact and coordination more difficult.

Considerations for boarding schools

- Establish clear lines of communication between boarding staff and school staff, and the two Boards if applicable
- Ensure there is coordination between the school and boarding staff taking into account the systems necessary to keep students safe before, during and after school, and at night
- Matrons and hostel managers know students intimately and as a result play a key role in safety systems, particularly at night. Increased bed checks and a system of alert if a student is missing need to be established immediately
- Ensure all parents are informed of the incident and what steps have been taken to support their child and keep them safe is critical
- Ensure students know the facts, the options and supports available to them
- Adults are responsible for the emotional safety of young people in their care. If the CMT is considering using senior students in a support role this needs to be approached cautiously. The emotional state of these senior students and their own history/experience needs to be carefully considered before implementing any peer support system and a way of regularly checking their wellbeing should be established
- Consider having extra activities and extra supervision at the weekends and after school when students may have down-time

Managing allegations of sexual abuse by an adult within an education setting

The Ministry of Education and Child, Youth and Family (CYF) have a Memorandum of Understanding, part of which is an agreement that they will work together, with Police and the Teachers Council, to ensure a prompt and effective response to allegations of abuse or concerns involving adults working in or associated with kura/schools and other education facilities. CYF, Ministry and NZSTA also have an abuse reporting protocol.

<http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/School/Traumatic-incidents-and-emergencies/MoE-STA-CYFProtocolForReportingActualOrSuspectedChildAbuseNov09Amendment-3-2015.pdf>

<http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/School/Traumatic-incidents-and-emergencies/AllegationsOfAbuseProtocolMOU-CYFandMOE2012.pdf>

When allegations of sexual abuse are made against an adult working in a school it is critical that the school's CMT members know how to manage the situation as safely as possible. This often involves periods of intense work completed at different times because of the judicial process. Police and Child Youth and Family will be involved and will be able to help guide process.

The reporting procedure in respect of the child/young person:

- Follow the advice of CYF/Police
- Avoid further risks to the child(ren), or young person(s)
- Ensure there is no contact between the child and the person whom the allegation is against

Process for employee investigation

- Start an initial employment investigation
- Maintain close liaison with the police and avoid any action that may compromise their investigation
- Immediately seek advice from NZSTA or another approved employment advisor and advise your insurer
- It is important that no one person has responsibility for dealing with both the reporting issues and employment issues as there is potential for there to be tension between the two

- When police advise, notify the employee of the allegation and advise of the potential consequences
- Consider whether it is appropriate for the employee to remain in the school (follow advice)
- Advise the employee of the right to seek support from union or other representatives.
- The Board needs to determine whether they will defer their process while the police do the preliminary investigation, or whether they will proceed. Criminal investigations are separate from any employment investigation that the employer will follow.
- Ensure records are kept of any comments or event relating to the complaint(s) and/or allegations, and follow-up action is taken.

Note: *Deciding when and who will inform the parent(s) and/or caregiver will be determined by CYF and Police in consultation with the school.*

Child, Youth and Family (CYF) Support

Once the allegations have made public (and often just as a result of the community networks) there may be more disclosures. Teachers and parents need to know how to manage these. CYF will be able to help with this. They have pamphlets available about how to respond to disclosures. Parents potential reactions, based on fear, may include questioning their children. This can make evidence inadmissible so having recommendations available for concerned parents is important

If a disclosure is made to a parent or a teacher advise the following

- Listen to the child
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing
- Provide comfort to the child and let them know they are not in trouble
- Do not interview the child, and limit questions to open prompts – “What happened next?”
- Record, word for word, what the child said as soon as possible
- If the child is not in immediate danger, re-involve the child in ordinary activities
- If the child is in visible distress, provide them with an appropriate activity under supervision until they are able to participate in ordinary activities
- Contact the Police or CYF in line with the school’s disclosure policy
- Notify CYF Contact Centre (0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459); fax number (09) 914 1211 or email CyfCallCentre@cyf.govt.nz) or the Police and ask for an indication of likely action and their time frames

- Seek advice from CYF on what to tell the child or young person (decisions concerning after school arrangements and notifying the parents will be made by police and CYF social workers in consultation with the school)
- Get support for yourself from appropriate people if needed.

CMT should consider the following

- Teachers may be concerned at how to answer children's questions once the information is public and some potential questions and answers sheets may be helpful
- The investigation may lead to an arrest and a subsequent trial may see staff members being called to give evidence which can be daunting
- Even more emphasis on confidentiality is needed and on ensuring the CMT records and dates all decisions and all actions carefully
- Often the school name is suppressed but communities within your locale will become aware
- The adult the allegations have been made against may also have name suppression – the school will be told if and when this will be lifted so a communication plan can be developed
- Be extremely careful about what statement / scripts for teachers and parents say to avoid jeopardising due legal process or to raise the emotional level even higher
- Front desk staff will need carefully scripted responses for responding to questions from parents, and potentially from students
- Guidelines for teachers and the support system for any children of concern, with rationale, need to be distributed to all staff with confidentiality stressed
- Systems of checking the well-being of complainant children if they remain in school need to be quickly established. Recommend to teachers not to change how they would normally respond to the complainant children
- Increased supervision at lunchtime is a good idea so children can be redirected into meaningful fun activities if teachers see vulnerable students / complainant students being isolated or teased. Commonsense to prevail – what would teachers normally be expected to do if they see children being bullied, teased, ostracised etc
- If there is an arrest and it goes to trial there is a need to consider the potential impact on the school community whether the accused is found guilty or innocent and plan for either event
- If found not guilty then a transition plan back into school will be needed if the staff member decides to return. Remember that everyone will have an opinion - the staff

member will need a safety plan for their return such as buddy teaching, reminders of not being alone with a student out of public view, reminders of safe touching, another adult in class such as a teacher aide etc

- Post-trial information to the parent community about the school's plan to minimise the possibility of such an incident happening again should be distributed

Investigations can take a long time, and trial processes even longer. Schools need to be prepared for the long haul. The whole process will be extremely distressing for the CMT members managing the incident – ensure you have your own supports in place at the end of each day.

Contact the Ministry

You should notify your regional Director of Education as soon as possible after the allegations have been made. The Director will contact their Education Managers and the local Ministry TI Coordinator and organise an appropriate team to support the CMT to manage the event. The Director will ensure the appropriate people at a higher level from within and external to the Ministry are informed so support can be accessed as and when needed. This is particularly important in a high-profile case to enable a coordinated response where more than one school may be involved.

EDUCANZ

It is a mandatory that schools send a report to EDUCANZ when an allegation of abuse has been made against a teacher. EDUCANZ runs their own process but links with Police.

Reactions

There is highly likely to be strong emotional reactions from both the staff and parent community

Parents:

- Heightened anxiety about whether their own child may have been abused
- Anger towards the school for not keeping children safe
- Apportioning blame and raising questions about continued safety of their child/ren
- Disbelief, especially if the teacher concerned is popular / well respected / considered a good teacher, and guilt if they campaigned to have their child in that teacher's class
- Strong need to ask their child questions to find out if they have been abused
- High risk of parent's unwittingly prejudicing the case should their own child make a disclosure
- Intense need to discuss the situation with other parents with a high level of speculation and rumour ('Chinese whispers')

Staff:

- Disbelief that a colleague could have done this
- Guilt that some action on their part could have prevented it happening
- Guilt that lack of action may have allowed it to happen
- Concern about reputation of the school
- Heightened anxiety about how they personally will be perceived
- Uncertainty on how to manage reactions of the parent community, friends and family
- Uncertainty on how to respond to questions or further disclosures by children and young people
- Anger towards complainant students if they do not believe it could have happened
- May start doubting their ability to 'judge' character

Note: If there is a trial, and depending on the outcome of it, how the community has perceived the management of the event may result in the potential for complaints, queries around children's safety, accusations that BoT/principals should have known, blame for putting an innocent person through this, blame for not acting before to remove the accused, polarisation of staff, community vigilantism etc which will need to be managed. It is critical that you keep a record of all communications and all decisions.

Communication

There will be a police and Child, Youth and Family (CYF) investigation and due legal process must occur without prejudice. BOT and principals may be privy to information that they are legally obliged to withhold from sharing with their staff or community, for example, they may be told that allegations have been made and that the police are investigating but this unable to be made public. If rumours are swirling and information can't be shared there can be a perception that there is a cover up. This can be a big burden to carry. The Ministry TI team will be able guide you around what you need to consider to support you when developing communication pieces. There will likely be intense media interest. Police will take responsibility for media releases and you should take your lead from them re any information going out to the school community. It can be helpful to have a scripted message, for example, *"This is a very difficult time for everybody and we appreciate your concern and support. Due legal process now needs to be gone through."*

TI Team Coordinators may be able to provide you with some contact details of organisations that specialise in media communications for schools. If the cost of the contractor exceeds the school budget the Ministry may reimburse some of the expenses.

When the incident your team has been managing is over

Don't forget yourself

- Acknowledge it has been tough
- Evaluate your own sense of well being
- Recognize the need for a recovery period
- Recognize the value of the work you do
- Make sure you are supported by family and friends

Take some time as a CMT (a little while down the track)

- Go over your procedures with the following in mind
 - What worked well during implementation of your school plan?
 - What would have made CMT more effective during the incident and what were the barriers you perceived?
 - What would you do differently next time?
 - What sort of things did you find you needed but didn't have or didn't have the resources to access?
 - What needs to be added, adapted or removed from your current procedures to strengthen a future response?

Note: The Ministry TI team can support this process

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CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH

The range of what are normal reactions is very wide. Individual children will react differently to the same situation. These differences are determined by a variety of factors including the cognitive and emotional development of the child or young person. However, there are responses that tend to be typical of various age groups.

Early years of school

- Children are beginning to learn that death is permanent.
- They begin to realise that when someone dies there is no coming back, but they need to hear what has happened many times over.
- Some children feel responsible for the death or separation and think it was because they were naughty.
- They may also be worried about who will look after them, eg if they have lost a parent they may worry about losing the other parent as well.
- They may be very matter-of-fact in the way they talk about death and want lots of information, such as what happens to the body.
- They may not know what it is they are feeling or know the words to say how they feel, but you will see it in their behaviour and play.

Later primary school years

- Children now understand that death is permanent.
- They can also understand why death happens, eg illness, accident or old age. They can talk about their feelings better although they might not always do so.
- They are less likely to blame themselves for what has happened but they might blame others, eg blame one parent for a divorce
- They have a strong sense of right and wrong and might have strong views about what has happened.
- They may be interested in life after death and want to know what happens then and ask quite spiritual questions.
- They may still want to know all the facts about what happens to the body or details of an accident.
- As they get older, children are more able to understand what other people are going through as well

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN

- Provide a safe environment where your child feels able to express feelings in whatever way she or he can

- Help them to find ways to show their feelings through play, water play, writing a letter, a story, a poem, painting or drawing.
- Give factual information to them in a way that they can understand. Don't forget that children need to know what is happening even if they don't ask. Sometimes parents are so busy with their own needs that children can be overlooked.
- Young children may not seem sad when you think they should be, because they still don't really understand what it all really means. This isn't a lack of being sensitive; it is just the stage they are at.
- Allow children time to talk, ask questions and share worries with you. They might be very confused and need to ask lots of questions. If you can't talk about it, find another adult who is close to your child who can. If children can't talk to you about the loss, they might feel that it is not safe to talk about it at all and will continue to have muddled and scary feelings.
- You may have to answer the same question over and over as your child learns to understand what has happened
- It is natural to want to speculate and discuss the event with spouse, partner or friends but it is really important that your child is out of earshot when you do. It is very easy for children to misconstrue what you are saying and become scared or even more confused.
- Be honest. Parents sometimes lie to children because they want to protect them. If you don't tell them what has happened, you may prevent them from dealing with the loss and grieving. This can cause problems when they have other losses in their lives.
- Stick to as many of the family routines as you can. Too many changes will add further stress. Doing the same things as usual helps children to feel safe.
- If your teenager has had a loss and is acting angrily or withdrawing, try to make times available for them to talk, without pushing for answers. If it continues, talk to a health professional about it.
- Try to open the way if they feel unable to talk about their feelings. Say something like 'Some things are really hard to talk about, but talking can help. If you ever want to talk about what has happened, let me know'.
- Let your child's teacher know if there has been a big change or loss in your child's life. Teachers and friends at school can help to support your child.
- Keep some rules about what children are allowed to do. If you think they are taking advantage of the situation you will start to feel angry and that won't help.
- Share your own grief – don't hide your sadness. Children will feel more normal about their own feelings and feel comforted to know that the feelings they have are in line with those of the rest of the family. If you are really distressed it may not be wise to share

feelings with children because it is important that they know that you are in control and can keep them safe.

- Ceremonies such as funerals can be important ways for children as well as adults to help make sense of the big changes in their lives
- Sharing emotions can help people feel connected to others.
- Get support for yourself. Talk with your partner or a friend. Some agencies offer personal grief counselling
- Remember that children grieve in bursts. They have their own individual reactions, and they feel loss just as much as adults but may show it differently.
- Allow times for extra closeness and comfort.
- If your family has a spiritual belief this can be a support to children and parents.
- When it feels right, help your child or teenager to move on and try something new.
- Don't rely on your child for support. You need to support your child
- Be honest, trustworthy and reliable
- Give your grieving child special times with you to talk about feelings.
- The biggest need for children and teenagers who have a loss is that they are supported and cared for and have someone to talk to about it.
- If your child or teenager seems to not be managing, seek help.

Professional help is needed if a child

- Talks of not wanting to live or being better off dead
- Seems to be preoccupied with dying
- Is unable to concentrate and is withdrawn at school some months later
- Is crying, sad or depressed much of the time
- Does not want to join in or play with other children some months later
- Has severe reactions (such as intense hopelessness or fear) or this level of intensity goes on for more than a month and interferes with their ability to function

As severity can be difficult to determine don't feel you have to be certain before making a talking with your GP or paediatrician about referring your child to a mental health professional who will evaluate whether your child could benefit from some type of intervention.

PARENT TIPS FOR HELPING YOUNGER CHILDREN

Children vary in their capacity to see connections between events and emotions. Many children will benefit from a basic explanation of how disaster-related experiences produce upsetting emotions and physical sensations.

Reactions	Responses	Things you might do or say
Confusion about what happened	Give clear explanations of what happened whenever your child asks. Avoid details that would scare your child. Correct any information that your child is unclear or confused about regarding if there is a present danger. Remind children that there are people working to keep families safe and that your family can get more help if needed. Let your children know what they can expect to happen next.	"I know other kids said that more floods are coming, but we are now in a place that is safe from floods." Continue to answer questions your children have (without getting irritable) and to reassure them the family is safe. Tell them what's happening, especially about issues regarding school and where they will be living eg if flood or earthquake damage.
Feelings of being responsible. School-age children may have concern that they were somehow at fault, or should have been able to change what happened. They may hesitate to voice their concerns in front of others.	Provide opportunities for children to voice their concerns to you. Offer reassurance and tell them why it was not their fault.	Take your child aside. Explain that, "After a disaster like this, lots of kids-and parents to keep thinking 'What could I have done differently?' or 'I should have been able to do something.' That doesn't mean they were at fault. Or caused this to happen "Remember, the police said no one could stop Mary from walking out in front of the car and it wasn't your fault."

Reactions	Responses	Things you might do or say
Fears of recurrence of the event and reactions to the reminders	Help your child to identify reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day) and to clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it. Reassure them, as often as they need, that they are safe. Protect children from seeing media coverage of the event as it can trigger fears of the disaster happening again.	You might say "I think we need to take a break from the TV right now. When they recognize that they are being reminded of what happened, say, "Try to think to yourself, 'I am upset because I am being reminded of the floods because it is raining, but now there is no flood and I am safe
Retelling the event or acting out the event over and over	Permit the child to talk and act out these reactions. Let them know that this is normal. Encourage positive problem-solving in play or drawing.	"I notice you're drawing a lot of pictures of what happened. Did you know that lots of kids do that?" "Maybe it would help to draw about how you would like your school to be rebuilt to make it safer."
Fear of being overwhelmed by their feelings	Provide a safe place for them to express their fears, anger, sadness, etc. Allow children to cry or be sad; don't expect them to be brave or tough. Try not to ask children directly to describe their emotions (like telling you that they feel sad, scared, confused, or angry), as they often have a hard time finding the words.	"When scary things happen, people have strong feelings, like being mad at everyone or being very sad. Would you like to sit here with a blanket until you're feeling better?" Ask them to tell you about physical sensation, for example, you can ask, "How do you feel inside? Do you feel something like butterflies in your tummy or tight all over?"
Sleep problems including bad dreams, fear of sleeping alone, demanding to sleep with parents.	Let your child tell you about the bad dream. Explain that bad dreams are normal and they will go away. Do not ask the child to go into too many details of the bad dream. Temporary sleeping arrangements are okay and you can make a plan with your child to return to normal sleeping habits.	"That was a scary dream. Let's think about some good things you can dream about and I'll rub your back until you fall asleep." "You can stay in our bedroom for the next couple of nights. Then we will spend more time with you in your bed before you go to sleep. If you get scared again, we can talk about it."

Reactions	Responses	Things you might do or say
Concerns about the safety of themselves and others.	Help them to share their worries and give them realistic information.	Create a 'worry-box' where children can write out their worries and place them in the box. Set a time to look these over, problem-solve and come up with answers to the worries.
Altered behavior: Unusually aggressive or restless behavior.	Encourage the child to engage in recreational activities and exercise as an outlet for feelings and frustration.	"I know you didn't mean to slam that door. It must be hard to feel so angry. How about we take a walk? Sometimes getting our bodies moving helps with strong feelings."
Somatic complaints: headaches, stomach-aches, muscle aches for which there seems to be no reason.	Find out if there is a medical reason. If not, provide comfort and assurance that this is normal. Be matter-of-fact with your child; giving these non-medical complaints too much attention may increase them.	Make sure the child gets enough sleep, eats well, drinks plenty of water, and gets enough exercise. "How about sitting over there? When you feel better, let me know and we can play cards."
Closely watching your responses and recovery: Not wanting to disturb you with their own worries.	Give children opportunities to talk about their feelings as well as your own. Remain as calm as you can so as not to increase your child's worries.	"Yes, Jack is in hospital because he broke his leg but the doctors have put his leg in a cast and given him some medicine to stop it hurting. I bet it was scary seeing him fall out of the tree like that, wasn't it?"
Concern for other victims and families.	Encourage constructive activities on behalf of others, but do not burden with undue responsibility.	Help children identify projects that are meaningful (eg drawing pictures, writing poems or stories about a classmate who has died, or making cards for the family)

Managing adolescent reactions to loss and grief

The adolescent years are a time of great change - hormonal changes in the body reveal a multitude of emotions and can cause see-saw mood swings. The adolescent's struggle for independence can result in relationship difficulties within the family and school and they are often agonisingly self-conscious and strive not to seem different to their peers. Dealing with loss and grief can be very difficult at this time when the young person is already coping with many changes. Teenagers grieve in much the same way as adults but because at this stage of their development they often have emotional 'ups and downs' they can become deeply distressed

- Understand death as universal and inevitable - May wish to explore philosophical or religious questions about death
- Need comfort, support and acceptance from peers - Parents and other adults may feel excluded and rejected
- Will feel isolated and unsupported if friends don't know how to provide comfort and support
- Feelings of guilt, fear, frustration, anger and helplessness are common
- Could either become overcautious and reluctant to engage in any risk taking activity, or may engage in reckless behaviour
- May make important decisions impulsively, may become accident prone
- Use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs may increase- May seek comfort from opposite sex and from intimate sexual relationships
- Life may appear meaningless – have a sense of foreshortened future
- May have irrational guilt about surviving
- May have difficulty concentrating and performance at school may suffer
- Boys may feel it is not masculine to be affected by grief
- May take on parental roles to help protect their parents
- Teenagers can be greatly affected by grief following the break-up of relationships, parents' separation or the death of someone close to them.
- They can become withdrawn, depressed and moody. They will probably want to get support and spend time with their friends more than their family. However they still need to know that you are there for them to talk to if needed.
- Others just need to do active and noisy things such as go for a run, dance to loud music or play sport with friends to deal with their strong feelings. Still others seek comfort in music, writing poetry, walking alone or being in a quiet place to deal with their grief.

Strategies to support adolescents

- Contact with other adolescents in similar circumstances can be reassuring
- Be alert for rash decision making, encourage adolescents to delay major decisions
- Provide a supportive climate with opportunities to discuss fears, anxieties, feelings of guilt, frustration and anger and help them make sense of what happened, Help adolescents understand death as part of life - involve them in decision making as much as possible
- Help them to describe, share and understand their reactions their feelings.
- Answer questions honestly – there are no good secrets and if you don't know, say so
- Provide information about normal stress reactions and grief processes
- Talk to adolescents as adult-to-adult so you give the message that you respect their feelings, concerns and questions.
- Caution adolescents about doing something risky or impulsive just to feel better without discussing it with a parent or trusted adult. You might say “When something bad like this happens, it is really important to get support from adults you can trust. Is there anyone who helps you feel better when you talk to them? Maybe I can help you get in touch with them”
- Talk about what won't change in their life
- Be alert for students congregating, especially after a suicide
- Make opportunity for artwork. Drawing or painting out feelings, or playing with a piece of clay takes away some of the pain
- Talk about practical concerns. Students need to feel safe and have a sense of being able to rely on adults
- Offer reassurance about:
 - Guilt – tell them, “nothing you said or did can have caused this”
 - Illness of self or others – e.g. do they know cancer isn't catching?
- Offer information which is clear, simple, truthful and repeated. Link explanations to things students know already
- Maintain familiar routines
- Help students to use up feelings in safe ways – physical outlets are important
- Encourage memories – look at photographs, mementos, scrapbooks, tapes, memory boxes
- Encourage them not to be too hard on themselves
- Where appropriate (particularly with a death in the family) prepare the class before the student's return to school, find a student who will be supportive to staff “buddy”

with the student, and tell him or her what you have done. Make sure others know the circumstances

- Listen for confused thinking and discount rumour and dispel speculation e.g. 'that may be so but we don't know that'
- Reduce self-blame
- Allow to talk without dwelling on distressing details
- Reaffirm the future and talk in hopeful terms
- Be alert for band-wagon behaviour that may appear like a 'drama queen/king' seeking attention. The attention they are seeking may be to do with needing support to cope
- Teenagers can be greatly affected by grief following the break-up of relationships, parents' separation or the death of someone close to them
- They can become withdrawn, depressed and moody. They will probably want to get support and spend time with their friends more than their family. However they still need to know that parents and teachers are there for them to talk to if needed
- Young people often show sadness through acting out and angry behaviour which covers up their underlying feelings
- Some may turn to using drugs or alcohol, driving too fast or doing dangerous things. These young people need lots of support
- Some just need to do active and noisy things such as go for a run, dance to loud music or play sport with friends to deal with their strong feelings
- Others seek comfort in music, writing poetry, walking alone or being in a quiet place to deal with their grief
- If your teenager is facing a big loss such as the death of a friend, parent or loved grandparent it may help if he has a task to do at the funeral service or can do something special to remember that person by.
- Be alert for rash decision making, encourage them to delay major decisions
- Give them opportunities to discuss fears, anxieties, feelings of guilt, frustration and anger and help them make sense of what happened
- Help them to describe, share and understand their reactions their feelings.
- Answer questions honestly – there are no good secrets and if you don't know, say so
- Try to keep to your usual family and school routines

Parent Tips for Helping Teenagers

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things you might do or say
Detachment, shame, and guilt	Provide a safe time to discuss with your teen the events and their feelings. Emphasize that these feelings are common, and correct excessive self-blame with realistic explanations of what actually could have been done.	"Many kids and adults feel like you do. They feel angry and blame themselves that they couldn't do more. You're not at fault. Remember; even the police said there was nothing more we could have done."
Self-consciousness about their fears, sense of vulnerability, fear of being labeled abnormal	Help teens understand that these feelings are common. Encourage relationships with family and peers for needed support during the recovery period.	"I was feeling the same thing; scared and helpless. Most people feel like this when a disaster happens, even if they look calm on the outside." "My cell phone is working again. Why don't you see if you can get hold of Pete to see how he's doing ... and thanks for playing the game with your little sister. She's much better now."
Acting out behavior; using alcohol and drugs, sexual acting out, accident-prone behavior.	Help teens understand that acting out behavior is a dangerous way to express strong feelings (like anger) over what happened. Limit access to alcohol and drugs. Talk about the danger of high-risk sexual activity. On a time-limited basis, have them let you know where they are going and what they're planning to do.	"Many teens and some adults feel out of control and angry after a disaster like this. They think drinking or taking drugs will help somehow. It's very normal to feel that way but it's not a good idea to act on it." "It's important during these times that I know where you are and how to contact you." Assure them that this extra checking in is temporary, just until things have stabilized.

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things you might do or say
Fears of recurrence and reactions to reminders	Help to identify different reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day) and to clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it. Explain to teens that media coverage of the disaster can trigger fears of it happening again.	"When you're reminded, you might try saying to yourself, 'I am upset now because I am being reminded, but it is different now because the guy who did this is behind bars and everyone is safe'". Suggest that watching the news reports could make it worse, because they are playing the same images over and over. Suggest turning it off now.
Abrupt shifts in interpersonal relationships: Teens may pull away from parents, family, and even from peers; they may respond strongly to parent's reactions in the crisis.	Explain that the strain on relationships is to be expected. Emphasize that we need family and friends for support during the recovery period. Encourage tolerance for different family member's courses to recovery .Help them accept responsibility for their own feelings.	Spend more time talking as a family about how everyone is doing. Say, "You know, the fact that we're crabby with each other is completely normal, given what we've been through."I want to apologize for being irritable with you yesterday. I am going to work harder to stay calm myself."
Radical changes in attitude	Explain that changes in people's attitudes after a disaster are common, but will return back to normal over time.	"We are all under great stress. When people's lives are disrupted this way, we all feel more scared or angry, and even full of revenge. It might not seem like it, but we all will feel better when we get back to a more structured routine."
Wanting premature entrance into adulthood: (e.g., wanting to leave school, get married)	Encourage postponing major life decisions. Find other ways to help them feel more in control over things	"I know you're thinking about quitting school. But it is really important not to make big decisions right now. A crisis is not a great time to make major changes

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things you might do or say
Concern for other victims and families	Encourage constructive activities on behalf of others, but do not burden with undue responsibility.	Help teens to identify projects that are age-appropriate and meaningful (e.g., clearing debris from school grounds, collecting money or supplies for those in need).
High anxiety/arousal -Tension and anxiety are common after disasters. Adolescents (and adults) may be excessively worried about the future, have difficulties sleeping, problems concentrating, and feel jumpy and nervous. These reactions can include rapid heartbeat and sweating	Encourage deep breathing and/or other relaxation skills	“I know you’re finding this pretty hard and I can see that you’re really on edge. It’s a bit the same for me too, I’m finding it hard to get to sleep and feel sort of anxious all the time. Yesterday I tried some breathing and relaxation exercises to calm myself down. I did it 5 times throughout the day and it must have worked because I slept quite well last night and feel good today. I can show you a couple of techniques if you like.

Modelling Support

Reflective comments

- "From what you're saying, I can see how you would be ..."
- "It sounds like you're saying..."
- "It seems that you see that you are..."

Clarifying comments:

- "Tell me if I'm wrong ... it sounds like you ..."
- "Am I right when I say that you ..."
- "No wonder you feel. .."
- "It sounds really hard ..."
- "It sounds like you're being hard on yourself."
- "It is such a tough thing to go through something like this."
- "I'm really sorry this is such a tough time for you."
- "We can talk more tomorrow if you'd like."

Supportive comments

- "No wonder you feel..."
- "It sounds really hard..."
- "It sounds like you're being hard on yourself."
- "It's such a tough thing to go through something like this".
- "I'm really sorry this is such a tough time for you."
- "We can talk more tomorrow if you want to."

Empowering Comments and Questions:

- "What have you done in the past to make yourself better when things got difficult?"
- "Are there any things that you think would help you to feel better?"
- "I have an information sheet with some ideas about how to deal with difficult situations. Maybe there is an idea or two here that might be helpful for you."
"People can be very different in what helps them to feel better. When things get difficult, for me, it has helped me to... Do you think something like that would work for you?"

Some general guidelines for teachers supporting students

Communicate caring and acceptance

- Demonstrate a sincere interest in what the student is saying. Children will communicate more effectively when they feel safe, accepted and understood
- Recognise and acknowledge students' feelings so that they are able to feel at ease in exploring information further
- Maintain a positive attitude so that students are helped to view the future in a hopeful way. Reassure students that their feelings and behaviours are normal reactions and will fade in time
- Assist students with overwhelming, immediate problems initially. Success even in a small practical way will help to build trust and confidence

Be patient

- Allow the student to express his/her concerns at a rate that is personally comfortable.
- Be patient in gaining an understanding of the student's account of the incident. The story may be told in a garbled form with disjointed factual and emotional content flowing quickly.
- Tracing back carefully over aspects of the story, which can be discussed with comfort, may assist in ordering thoughts, reducing fears and re-establishing trust.

Be aware of body language

- Observe the student's body language and be sensitive to nonverbal signals of not coping he or she may be trying to communicate, for example, tone of voice, pace of speech, body positioning
- Maintain appropriate eye contact, lean forward slightly when talking and face the student to show attention and interest

Use simple language

- Listen carefully and try to understand what the experience means within the context of the student's total environment
- Use short sentences and unemotional language.
- Use a quiet, steady voice, with minimal prompts to encourage the student
- Encourage the student to express his/her feelings openly, for example, "How did you feel when...happened?"

- Allow the student to explore what has happened
- Use open-ended questions when seeking more information about facts, issues or a closer understanding of the student's feelings
- Closed questions can be used when wanting specific information, e.g. "Who is at home now?" "Was Christine on that bus?"

Monitor emotional/behavioural states

- Provide information to students when they request it in a way that they can understand.
- Do not attempt to hide the facts but avoid distressing detail and take into account the age and development of the student
- Monitor the student's physical, emotional and behavioural functioning over time – be alert for significant changes in behaviour
- Enlist support from others

COPING STRATEGIES FOR ADULTS

What helps

- Talking to another person for support
- Spending time with friends
- Engaging in positive distracting activities (sports, hobbies, reading)
- Getting adequate rest and eating healthy meals
- Trying to maintain a normal schedule
- Scheduling pleasant activities
- Taking breaks
- Reminiscing about a person who has died
- Focusing on something practical that you can do right now to manage the situation better
- Using relaxation methods (breathing exercises, meditation, calming self-talk, soothing music)
- Participating in a support group
- Exercising in moderation
- Keeping a journal

What doesn't help

- Using alcohol or drugs to cope
- Extreme withdrawal from family or friends
- Overeating or failing to eat
- Withdrawing from pleasant activities
- Working too much
- Violence or conflict
- Doing risky things (driving recklessly, substance abuse, not taking adequate precautions)
- Blaming others
- Extreme avoidance of thinking or talking about the event or a death of a loved one
- Not taking care of yourself

General information on coping

Adaptive coping actions are those that help to reduce anxiety, lessen other distressing reactions, improve the situation, or help people get through bad times. In general, coping methods that are likely to be helpful include:

The aim of discussing positive and negative forms of coping is to:

- Help survivors consider different coping options
- Identify and acknowledge their personal coping strengths
- Think through the negative consequences of maladaptive coping actions
- Encourage survivors to make conscious goal-oriented choices about how to cope
- Enhance a sense of personal control over coping and adjustment
- Talking to another person for support
- Getting needed information
- Getting adequate rest, nutrition, exercise
- Engaging in positive distracting activities (sports, hobbies, reading)
- Trying to maintain a normal schedule to the extent possible
- Telling yourself that it is natural to be upset for some period of time
- Scheduling pleasant activities
- Eating healthy meals
- Taking breaks
- Spending time with others
- Participating in a support group
- Using relaxation methods
- Using calming self talk
- Exercising in moderation
- Seeking counselling
- Keeping a journal
- Focusing on something practical that you can do right now to manage the situation better
- Using coping methods that have been successful in the past

Maladaptive coping actions tend to be ineffective in addressing problems.

Such actions include:

- Using alcohol or drugs to cope
- Withdrawing from activities
- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Working too many hours
- Getting violently angry
- Excessive blaming of self or others
- Overeating or under-eating
- Watching too much TV or playing too many computer games
- Doing risky or dangerous things
- Not taking care of oneself (sleep, diet, exercise, etc.)

Understanding stress reactions and coping

There are three types of post-traumatic stress reactions

Intrusive reactions are ways in which the traumatic experience comes back to mind. These reactions include distressing thoughts or mental images of the event (for example, picturing what one saw), or dreams about what happened. Among children, bad dreams may not be specifically about the disaster. Intrusive reactions also include upsetting emotional or physical reactions to reminders of the experience. Some people may feel and act like one of their worst experiences is happening all over again. This is called a "flashback."

Avoidance and withdrawal reactions are ways people use to keep away from, or protect against, intrusive reactions. These reactions include trying to avoid talking, thinking and having feelings about the traumatic event, and to avoid any reminders of the event, including places and people connected to what happened. Emotions can become restricted, even numb, to protect against distress. Feelings of detachment and estrangement from others may lead to social withdrawal. There may be a loss of interest in usually pleasurable activities.

Physical arousal reactions are physical changes that make the body react as if danger is still present. These reactions include constantly being "on the lookout" for danger, startling easily or being jumpy, irritability or having outbursts of anger, difficulty falling or staying asleep, and difficulty concentrating or paying attention.

Other things that may contribute to distress

Trauma Reminders can be sights, sounds, places, smells, specific people, the time of day, situations, or even feelings, like being afraid or anxious. Trauma reminders can evoke upsetting thoughts and feelings about what happened. Examples include the sound of wind, rain, helicopters, screaming or shouting, and specific people who

were present at the time. Reminders are related to the specific type of event, such as hurricane, earthquake, flood, tornado, or fire. Over time, avoidance of reminders can make it hard for people to do what they normally do or need to do.

Loss Reminders can also be sights, sounds, places, smells, specific people, the time of day, situations, or feelings. Examples include seeing a picture of a lost loved one, or seeing their belongings, like their clothes. Loss reminders bring to mind the absence of a loved one. Missing the deceased can bring up strong feelings, like sadness, feeling nervous, feeling uncertain about what life will be without them, feeling angry, feeling alone or abandoned, or feeling hopeless. Loss reminders can also lead to avoiding things that people want to do or need to do.

Change Reminders can be people, places, things, activities, or hardships that remind us of how our lives have changed from what they used to be as the result of a disaster. This can be something as simple as waking up in a different bed in the morning, going to a different school, or being in a different place. Even nice things can remind us of how life has changed, and make us miss what we had before.

Other kinds of reactions

Grief Reactions will be prevalent among those who survived the disaster but have suffered many types of losses, including the death of loved ones, and loss of home, possessions, pets, schools, and community. Loss may lead to feelings of sadness and anger, guilt or regret over the death, missing or longing for the deceased, and dreams of seeing the person again.

Traumatic Grief Reactions occur when children and adults have suffered the traumatic death of a loved one. Some may stay focused on the circumstances of the death, including being preoccupied with how the death could have been prevented, what the last moments were

like, and who was at fault. These reactions may interfere with grieving, making it more difficult for survivors to adjust to the death over time.

Depression is associated with prolonged grief reactions and strongly related to the accumulation of post-disaster adversities. Reactions include: persistent depressed or irritable mood, loss of appetite, sleep disturbance, greatly diminished interest or pleasure in life activities, fatigue or loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, feelings of hopelessness, and sometimes thoughts about suicide. Demoralization is a common response to unfulfilled expectations about improvement in post-disaster adversities and resignation to adverse changes in life circumstances.

Physical Reactions may be commonly experienced, even in the absence of any underlying physical injury or illness. These reactions include: headaches, dizziness, stomach aches, muscle aches, rapid heart beating, tightness in the chest, hyperventilation, loss of appetite, and stomach and bowel upsets.

AGENCY SUPPORTS

CASA (Clinical Advisory Services Aotearoa)

CASA provides two services:

1. *Toward Well Being Suicide Consultation and Monitoring Programme (TWB)*, an evidenced-based risk assessment, consultation and monitoring service to Ministry of Social Development's Child, Youth and Family Service (CYF) staff in assessing and responding to suicide risk in young people in contact with CYF.
2. *Community Postvention Response Service (CPRS)* which is a Ministry of Health funded service available when suicide contagion, cluster or emerging cluster is suspected in a community. CPRS works in partnership with community stakeholders with services ranging from assessment of community risk, the provision of one off consults (to agencies or individuals) to long term support for up to six months for high risk communities experiencing contagion and/or clusters.

If the assessment process completed by the CPRS team does determine the presence of contagion/cluster/emerging cluster, CPRS can offer to help the community coordinate and facilitate an interagency meeting to help put a solid, evidence-based postvention response in place. The purpose of such a response is to reduce the likelihood of further attempts or completed suicides occurring.

The CPRS does not:

- Provide postvention support after a single death by suicide
- Provide bereavement counselling

CPRS will work alongside community suicide postvention teams where they are established and with our traumatic incident teams if contagion has been identified. As it can be difficult to know whether suicide contagion is occurring CASA can be contacted directly for consultation about concerns about what is happening in the community and what steps, if any need to be taken. CPRS also contacts the Ministry Practice Leader High Risk issues to alert to possible contagion and will ask for the local TI coordinator contact details to alert and offer support. You can contact the Community Postvention Response Service on freephone **0800 448 908** or via email at cprs@casa.org.nz

VICTIM SUPPORT

Provides emotional and practical support to families affected by crime and other trauma like suicide and fatal accidents. Victim Support has an agreement with Ministry of Health to work closely with CASA when there has been a suicide. Their postvention service has four

primary objectives: to ease trauma, prevent adverse grief reactions/complications, minimise risk of suicidal behaviour in the grieving, and encourage coping and resilience.

Volunteers' engage with family, the discoverer of the body and wider network of friends and colleagues. Where the circle of affected people is wide, the volunteer asks the 0800 service to dispatch more workers. Each volunteer's engagement and case work with affected persons is supervised by a Bereavement Service Specialist (BSS). BSS and Volunteer work closely to assess need and provide support. Risk screening undertaken – QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) when necessary.

Victim Support does not:

- Provide financial assistance, counselling or therapy, facilitate grief groups, attend or support after an attempted suicide, work directly with children aged 16 years or under
- Act as *lead agency* in postvention initiatives or prevention initiatives established by DHB's or other organisations (although they are often on committees as a stakeholder)

While there is no funding assistance available to families affected by suicide, victims of serious crimes such as homicide and sexual assault may be eligible for financial assistance.

Local Victim Support Coordinators are usually on the local suicide postvention committees along with Ministry TI Coordinators. They will usually contact the Ministry TI Coordinator if there has been a suicide that affects a school community as a way to alert.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Child, Adolescent and Family Services (CAFS) /Child, Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) often work in partnership with Ministry TI teams when the incident involves suicide or other high risk trauma situations. Some districts have protocol for working together to support schools and early childhood services to manage traumatic events signed between the local Ministry district and DHB.

CAFS/CAHMS and Ministry TI team members understand the risks involved when there has been a serious incident such as suicide and ideally will work in partnership alongside the Crisis Management Team to make sure procedures and systems are in place to minimise the risk. CAFS practitioners have specific clinical training in mental health issues and will conduct at-risk (of suicide) assessments on identified students on site if necessary and ensure safety plans are developed.

CAFS/CAHMS practitioners can also alert their colleagues to the incident and ask them to check on their clients who attend the school as they are often amongst the most vulnerable. It can be confusing for all involved if communication between TI teams and CAFS/CAMHS is not clear and the roles of each are not understood. TI Coordinators are strongly advised to build relationships with mental health services with the view to developing protocol for responding.

YOUTHLINE (available in most areas)

A key aspect of the Youth Development Strategy is that all young people have opportunities to actively engage in their community. Youthline has been involved in schools, adding to the Health Curriculum and providing seminars linking young people with the tools to access information to equip them with the skills, resources and initiative required to access information and to ask for help

When there is a traumatic incident Youthline are helpful in monitoring social media and will respond quickly (within hours) supplying helpline cards and information

YOUTH ONE STOP SHOP (Called various names)

<http://arataiohi.org.nz/NetworkofYouthOneStopShops>

Youth One Stop Shops are approved social service providers, supported by the Department of Child, Youth and Family, the Ministry of Health. They work from a youth development framework which helps ensure young people are fully prepared for adult life by addressing broader developmental needs instead of focusing primarily on solving or fixing their problems. YOSS empowers young people to make informed choices to enhance their positive well-being and self development and provides opportunities for them to actively participate in decisions which impact on their well-being. YOSS has a range of staff available to support young people often including clinical psychologists, doctors, counsellors, mentors. In some Ministry districts the YOSS manager is a member of the local suicide prevention team. During a traumatic incident response the YOSS team can support affected young people and communicate any risks to parents and school to ensure support plans are in place.

POLICE

Where there have been allegations of offending or arrest of a staff member, due legal process must be allowed to take place without interference. Where there has been a death or a major accident, next of kin need to be informed before any names are released. These

can be extremely challenging for the CMT. Police sometimes are part of the CMT and can guide in what can and can't be communicated publicly, the timing of when things can be made public and whether the police or the school provide media statements. Police can also advise on legal process and keep the CMT updated as new information comes to hand.

Youth Aide officers can play a critical role in supporting the management of a situation. If students leave a school without permission Youth Aide officers, who often know where young people congregate outside of school and also know many students at risk, can go looking for them more easily than school staff can and return them to school or to their parents.

The police SIGNAL social media monitoring system developed in NZ is a prevention tool that allows police to get (only) publicly available, real-time information to accurately predict when and where crime and disorder will happen or is happening, disaster and emergency management, prevention of life-threatening activities, problems with infrastructure at large events. In situations when young people are at risk of suicide or have threatened homicide and their whereabouts is unknown, SIGNAL could potentially pin point the location from where they are posting messages and local police dispatched to the address to check on them.

CHILD YOUTH AND FAMILY (CYF)

CYF is the government agency that has legal powers to intervene to protect and help children who are being abused or neglected.

When a traumatic incident occurs that involves allegations of abuse by an adult working in an education setting CYF will automatically be involved as will police. CYF will provide schools or early childhood centres with information for concerned parents, how to respond to disclosures, the process after a disclosure is made etc.

In situations when it appears a young person has taken their life CYFs be invaluable in identifying young people who attend the school (or other schools) who are under CYFs and who may be at risk as a result of the suspected suicide. The CYRAS (computer) system enables them to call up current details of the young person, and will ensure their social worker checks on their well-being as soon as possible.

It is important to remember that if CYF is the legal guardian of a student in your school and something happens to them, they need to be informed before the caregivers. CYF will take responsibility for informing the student's caregiver family.

Helpful websites and contacts

Ministry of Education

<http://www.education.govt.nz/school/student-support/student-wellbeing/bullying-prevention-and-response/>

Net Safe

<http://www.netsafe.org.nz/the-netsafe-kit-for-schools/>

<http://www.netsafe.org.nz/the-kit/outline>

<http://www.netsafe.org.nz/cyberbullying-advice-for-young-people-parents-and-teachers/>

Child Youth and Family

<http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/School/Traumatic-incidents-and-emergencies/MoE-STA->

[CYFProtocolForReportingActualOrSuspectedChildAbuseNov09Amendment-3-2015.pdf](http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/School/Traumatic-incidents-and-emergencies/MoE-STA-CYFProtocolForReportingActualOrSuspectedChildAbuseNov09Amendment-3-2015.pdf)

<http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/School/Traumatic-incidents-and-emergencies/AllegationsOfAbuseProtocolMOU-CYFandMOE2012.pdf>

<http://www.cyf.govt.nz/>

<http://www.cyf.govt.nz/working-with-others/working-with-schools.html>

Vulnerable Children Act

<http://childrensactionplan.govt.nz/legislation-/>

Civil Defence

<http://whatstheplanstan.govt.nz>

<http://www.education.govt.nz/school/student-support/emergencies/tips-and-tools/>

Psychological First Aid

http://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/PFA_SchoolCrisis.pdf

<http://www.psychology.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/1-Listen-Protect-and-Connect-Psychological-First-Aid-for-children-parents-and-Other-caregivers-after-natural-disasters.pdf>

<http://www.dodea.edu/crisis/upload/PsychologicalFirstAid.pdf>

http://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/LPC_Booklet.pdf

http://www.nctsn.net/nctsn_assets/pdfs/pfa/2/PsyFirstAid.pdf